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A PERSPECTIVE FOR EDUCATORS ON THE RACIAL ISSUE IN EDUCATION.

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THIS ARTICLE REVIEWS THE PATTERNS OF PREJUDICE AND DE FACTO SEGREGATION MAINTAINED BY THE SCHOOLS. IT IS FELT THAT THERE MUST BE CHANGES IN ALL ASPECTS OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS TO ACHIEVE FULL SCHOOL INTEGRATION. AREAS NEEDING CHANGE INCLUDE ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS, CURRICULUM BIAS, AND THE LOW LEVEL OF TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS FOR NEGRO CHILDREN. DE FACTO SEGREGATION PERPETUATES THE MYTH OF RACIAL INFERIORITY, PSYCHOLOGICALLY DAMAGES NEGROES, DEGRADES THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS FOR BOTH RACES, AND SUBVERTS PROFESSIONAL VALUES. THE SCHOOLS' POSTURE OF ACCOMODATION OR NEUTRALITY IS DESTRUCTIVE BECAUSE IT PERPETUATES THE STATUS QUO. IF SCHOOL SYSTEMS WERE TO TAKE MAJOR STEPS TOWARD INTEGRATION, DE FACTO SEGREGATION IN THE COMMUNITY WOULD ALSO BE WEAKENED. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "PHI DELTA KAPPAN," VOLUME 47, NUMBER 9, MAY 1966. (NH)

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A Perspective for Educators on the Racial Issue in Education

By BENJAMIN SOLOMON

THE movement against school segregation—*de jure* and *de facto*—was initiated and powered by civil rights groups. In the main, educators stood aside. Only recently is leadership of any significance coming from schoolmen—but still from only a small segment of the profession.

Moreover, little has been done to analyze the racial issue in the framework of education itself, i.e., in regard to the process and aims of education and the roles and responsibilities of professional personnel. This paper hopes to contribute towards such an analysis.

For most teachers and administrators, school integration is still an external force, imposed by the community for what may be valid reasons of social and moral policy but not understood to be an intrinsic concern of education. In fact, some schoolmen deplore integration campaigns as interfering with the regular business of education. In any case, school integration is viewed as a matter largely handled by administrative measures such as assignment of pupils and location of schools.

On the other hand, may not the racial issue be conceived of as having a far-reaching and essential connection with education? It is this point of view that we wish to explore here. Its implications are: 1) segregation and integration are not marginal but *central* considerations entering into the aims and process of education, and 2) the progress of integration depends on changes in all aspects of the educational process.

It follows that the orientation of the professional staff—its understanding, attitudes, commitment—would be of crucial importance in such reshaping. Education is not mechanical: its aims and process are embodied in and bound up with the human spirit that the professional staff brings to its interaction with students. The fundamental question is the human—and thereby educational—environment created in the classroom, the school, and throughout the school system. This environment is primarily the responsibility of teachers and administrators.

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Accommodation and Its Consequences

Our analysis will be centered on *de facto* segregation. A grasp of the existing pattern is necessary to understand the significance of the racial factor in education and to develop an approach to integration.

We start with the overwhelming fact that we have a "race problem"—that in the main relationships between whites and Negroes in our cities have been regulated according to dictates of segregation. The established pattern, based on explicit or tacit assumption of Negro inferiority, comprises a complex set of beliefs and practices, including substantial physical separation. Whites experience superior conditions and consequences; Negroes, the opposite. The racist pattern degrades the quality of life throughout the whole community; yet the dominant group resists change.

What of school systems in this community setting? We must conclude that they have been an integral part of the going pattern. To deny this charge would be to assert that an institution which is deeply intertwined with all other phases of life has somehow become different from the whole. There is no public record of substantial and long-term efforts by a school system to resist the dominant pattern.

All this is obvious enough, perhaps. But its gross implications for education often seem to be ignored. These are, first, that segregation in education is not solely a matter of racial separation of students attributable to housing concentrations but is a pattern which has been incorporated throughout the multiple aspects of the educational process. Second, our schools accepted, became part of, and in practice helped perpetuate the system of race relations. Such accommodation meant acceptance of and action based on the

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premise that underlies segregation, namely, racial inferiority.

Our task now is to present a more specific characterization of *de facto* school segregation, as follows: 1) major elements of the segregated educational process; 2) its major educational consequences; and 3) the role of educators in the going system of segregation.

Major Elements of De Facto Segregation

Our aim in bringing together major elements of *de facto* school segregation is to show them as a comprehensive pattern.[1]

Generally, discussions of segregation focus on physical separation of the student population. True, there is housing segregation but, typically, there has been more separation than could be accounted for by residential concentrations. In 1954, Harry S. Ashmore summarized practices which had evolved in *de facto* situations in the non-South:

> . . . gerrymandering school districts, encouraging "voluntary" choices of separate schools by Negro pupils, carefully regulating transfer permits, and other comparable administrative arrangements have been common.[2]

To many people, including educators, separation has simply appeared as "natural." The history of separate schools for Negro children in the North goes back to the beginnings of public education in this country.

In the typical city, virtually no Negro members of the faculty taught in white areas. This, again, has usually been informal practice. Negro teachers learned not to bid for jobs outside the ghetto schools. The rationalization that Negro teachers impose the limitation on themselves is, of course, transparent.

The curriculum in relevant areas lacks, whether by commission or omission, a valid account of the Negro part in American history, or of the development and course of racism in American society, or of a view of Negroes as equal and legitimate participants in American life. In a recent examination of the treatment of the Negro in California textbooks, six historians found

> . . . the greatest defect in the textbooks we have examined is the virtual omission of the Negro. As several of the individual reporters point out, the Negro does not "exist" in the books.[3]

Thus, in this crucial and sensitive subject area, where understanding and attitudes are formed, our classrooms utilize "historical distortions that help perpetuate and intensify the pattern of racial discrimination which is one of society's most serious problems."[4] Further, from kindergarten on, Negroes have been excluded from materials used in various aspects of the curriculum.

The bias in the curriculum leads naturally to the question of what beliefs, attitudes, and expectations exist in the minds of school personnel with respect to Negro children. The answer perhaps is that educators in all parts of the country were exposed in their early lives as much as other members of society to prevalent beliefs and practices. College and professional experience have not seriously challenged early indoctrination. Kenneth Clark, among others, noted the virtual institutionalization of the viewpoint that a lesser achievement by Negro students is normal:

> . . . teachers in the New York public school system whom my white students have interviewed said that Negro children are inherently inferior in intelligence and therefore cannot be expected to learn as much or as readily as white children; . . .[5]

The belief, whether held consciously or unconsciously, that Negro children are less educable than white children leads inevitably to a lesser commitment to educating Negro children and to lower standards and expectations. Such beliefs and attitudes are intangibles, but intangibles are the very essence of education—they provide the dynamic to the learning process.

Low expectations in education have an inevitability about them that makes them "self-fulfilling prophecies." The clinching factor often is the belief that Negroes are, in any case, destined for menial jobs. Much vocational guidance openly or tacitly accepts horizons for Negro youth limited to the narrow range of "Negro" occupations. Trade schools have been historically closed to Negroes by union fiat, with the acquiescence of school authorities.

The institutionalization of low expectations, commitment, and standards has been embodied in "difficult schools." Historically, these have been schools with grossly inadequate conditions for teaching and learning—deteriorated buildings,

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[1] We know that in very recent years some changes have begun to take place. The characterization which follows describes what was typical before strong civil rights pressures on northern cities. The changes so far have merely modified, not eliminated, the traditional pattern.

[2] *The Negro and the Schools.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954, p. 67, quoted in Meyer Weinberg, "School Integration in American History," *Integrated Education,* January, 1964, pp. 21-22.

[3] For report see Kenneth M. Stampp, *et al.,* "The Negro in American History Textbooks," reprinted in *Integrated Education,* October-November, 1964, pp. 9-26.

[4] *Ibid.,* p. 9.

[5] Kenneth B. Clark, "Clash of Cultures in the Classroom," *Integrated Education,* August, 1963, p. 10.

overcrowded classrooms, insufficient supplies, transient teachers, inappropriate techniques, abandonment of standards, low morale, and little learning. Many teachers leave as soon as they find an opening in a "better" school in a white area. Both the school system and community appear to have two standards of education—good schools for white children and "difficult" schools for Negro children.

But white children also experience the pattern. We have already mentioned physical separation of children, denial to white children of Negroes as teachers and principals, and bias in the curriculum. In many all-white schools, attitudes and practices directly or indirectly reflect prevalent community biases. Among the faculty there is no mutual, expressed, professional concern about the problem—whether it be to try to prevent instances of open or subtle bias in the classroom or to consider the value of integration. How many all-white schools with empty classrooms have said: "Send us Negro children"? How many schools with only white faculty members have asked Negro colleagues to bid on vacancies? The major influence of all-white schools has been to reinforce the notion that Negro schools are an alien part of the school system and that Negro students are different, inferior, and not worthy of association.

Consequences for Education

De facto segregation has stamped its pattern on school processes, just as it has on community life generally. Not only has the overall framework epitomized segregation but the crucial, sensitive core of the teaching-learning process has also been infected with society's racial malady. Inevitably, the educational consequences are serious.

1. *Perpetuation of a falsehood.* A public school system which has accommodated to segregation becomes a living example of segregation in its structure and operation. Such a system necessarily confirms and supports in the minds and attitudes of its student body the beliefs that 1) segregation is the proper way of life in America, and 2) Negroes are racially inferior, the doctrine which underlies segregation. While shocking, these are the logical and inevitable results of conformity to segregation. To help perpetuate such a falsehood as racial inferiority undermines truth as a fundamental value of education. The falsehood is one of enormous proportions, endangering the very survival of society. To inculcate truth in this crucial area of social life, our schools must exemplify truth in each classroom, each school, and the school system as a whole.

2. *Psychological harm and substandard education for Negro children.* Segregation in the multiple aspects of the educational process results in inferior education for large numbers of Negro children. Much recent history stems from the protest movement finally generated by this fact. Negro children in public schools have been walled off from the rest of society. They have been placed in a system which institutionalizes low expectations, diluted standards, inadequate educational conditions, and scandalously little achievement. Until very recently little thought has been given to the problems of educating Negro children—not even on a "separate but equal" basis. And the notion has hardly penetrated among educators that segregation itself, even if barely disguised in the *de facto* form, inhibits the key energizers of learning, interest, and motivation of students.

3. *Degradation of educational process in white as well as Negro sector.* Neither white children nor teaching staff can be insulated from the effects of inferior education in the Negro sector.

An example is the new white teacher who suffers through his assignment to a Negro school until he can transfer to a "better" school in a white area. Meanwhile, he learns to accept inferior educational conditions and standards as normal, thus stunting the development of those sensibilities in him which are most important for the teaching-learning process. Inevitably, he incorporates into his teaching approach a lack of confidence in the educability of children—not only Negro but *all* children. More generally, the continued acceptance of *de facto* segregation must have a corrupting and depressing effect on the orientation of teachers towards the work of education. The premise and workings of segregation deny the values and aims of public education. The issue may be veiled for many teachers; yet, even if subtly, implicitly, or unconsciously, what innumerable compromises of spirit must each one make?

For the system as a whole, the average level of attainment, which sets the standard of comparison and challenge, is lowered by the downward pull of the ghetto sector where standards go by the board. This is no small matter, for in the world of intangibles which is education our expectations and demands have a great effect on what the student accomplishes. Complacency fed on adulterated norms nurtures mediocre education.

In biracial schools, which inevitably appear on the expanding periphery of the ghetto, the complaint frequently arises that there is a de-

terioration of standards as a consequence of the entry of low-achieving Negro children. Track systems are often installed. Such schools become microcosms of the entire segregated school system. They accept inferior achievement as normal for Negro students and make no significant effort to bring Negroes into the mainstream of the educational process. Whites are bound to suffer educationally as well as Negroes when the latter are not enabled to contribute to the intellectual life of the school.

4. *Subversion of professional values.* Acceptance of segregation in education by the teaching profession results in injury to its commitment, standards, integrity, and unity. To give one glaring example, the color line within the professional staff, as shown by absence of Negro teachers from schools in white areas, is an outright violation of professional integrity and a disunifying force in the profession.

More generally, if the educator does not see *and desire* the educational values of integration, he is—whether unconsciously or not—accepting the injuries to education and to himself which accrue from accommodation to segregation. Those who accept the web of segregation in education often resort to defensive rationalization when the web is challenged. Such educators live in constant anxiety because of rapid changes in the city. The question which haunts them is: "Will Negroes eventually come to my school?" When integrationist groups press for changes, their defensive postures harden, thus accelerating the degradation of professional values inherent in accommodation.

Within the segregated context there is no forum among educators for serious and persistent confrontation with the color line in education. Those teachers who do see the need for integration are frustrated by conformity to the racial system all around them. With no comprehensive effort in the school system to get at the manifold roots and practices of segregation, such teachers find themselves isolated or harassed if they are outspoken and seek to initiate changes with a sense of urgency. Some may leave teaching because working in a climate of neglect or rejection of children and educational values creates a psychological stress greater than they can endure.

A Posture of Accommodation and Neutrality

The human element is the dynamic of the education process and the embodiment of the aims of education. What can we say, then, of the part played by teachers and school officials when we contemplate that the spirit and practice of segregation have been incorporated into school processes?

School people could reply that they should not be singled out for condemnation because they acquiesce in the dominant community pattern. They might even claim that their record is in some ways better than other sectors of the community. Yet it would be belittling the profession to agree that it has no special responsibility in its own sphere. To abdicate responsibility is to say that education has no special meaning or values and that there is no professional role for educators.

Indeed, there is a truly professional role, one which is crucial to education. But for teachers to play their part in the future they must understand what happened in the past—what segregation in education has been and what part educators played.

We have already indicated what took place—education accommodated to the pattern of race relationships. This means, in human terms, that teachers and officials—though with honorable exceptions—geared decisions to the overall pattern. The pattern, after all, had its own logic, its own sense of being natural and fitting, its own support from those who shared its premises, and its own tremendous resistance to change. To try to change even one aspect might bring opposition, simply because any change is a threat to the whole. If a teacher should strive for a Negro member on an all-white faculty or raise questions about the social science materials, would he not be inviting trouble and notoriety? If a school official decided that attendance boundaries could be drawn to increase integration, would not this incur outraged cries from many sources? Better, therefore, to adhere to what was normal, established, and expected. In any case, why try to change one practice in what is clearly an overall pattern, one established not only in tried-and-true practice but also in the ingrained mental and emotional habits of many people? Before the issue was forced by civil rights protests, few educators thought of altering the pattern.

The overt posture of many school people on the racial issue in education is "neutrality." On the one hand, according to this outlook, educators should not take sides on such a controversial matter, one outside the province of education. On the other hand, the problems raised by integrationists do not really exist in schools, i.e., school people are and have been "color blind." State school codes in the North prohibit racial distinctions and school officials typically

have held that they do not recognize color: children are children, teachers are teachers. Only generally accepted criteria are taken into account —and race is not one of these.

Whatever merits the principle of "color blindness" may have for education, the important point is that "color blindness" never existed in the first place. Virtually every person in a *de facto* segregated city is intensely aware of color, including educators. One might wonder at the common use of the appellations, "Negro schools" or "white schools," or, as one harried superintendent put it: "Our city has no segregated schools and, anyway, the Negro schools are just as good as the white schools." An apt example is the drawing of attendance districts. Officially, administrators will not admit that racial composition is a factor. Yet how could it not be a factor? Are they unaware of the racial composition of the area? This is hardly likely. And, if aware, can they blithely set the information aside, though its implications are of great concern to everyone else—parents, teachers, principals, children?

Color blindness and neutrality are false postures: they do not really exist. The racial issue is a real one in society; neutrality in education can only be a pretense for conformity with the *status quo*. The real alternatives before educators are either to strive for a fully integrated educational process or to collaborate with the existing pattern of segregation.

Education and the Racial Issue

We set ourselves the question at the beginning: Does the racial factor have an intrinsic bearing on the core processes and aims of education? Is it an internal concern of education and educators, or primarily an external matter?

The pattern we have described and the consequences we have assessed strongly indicate that segregation and education are incompatible. *De facto* segregation has infused every important aspect of the workings of education; it has corrupted and undermined the teaching-learning process in its most salient and sensitive aspects; it has violated the integrity and subverted the values of education; and it has produced consequences on a vast scale which mock the most cherished aims of education.

We face in education what we face in American life generally—a deeply rooted system of human relationships based on a racial superiority theory. This system embodies intellectual fraud and moral abdication. Since education has the task of forwarding the intellectual and moral development of children, school processes which incorporate the practices of segregation nurture within themselves forces opposed to the central aims of education.

The intellect cannot be viewed apart from the moral factor in knowledge and thought. Therefore we cannot conceive of a professional staff fully pursuing the aims of education whose own moral fiber has been undermined by accommodation to a false racial theory. A moral factor underlies every sphere of life; in education it is perhaps more decisive than in most other spheres.

Integration—An Affirmative Position for Educators

In the space available we can only briefly characterize an integrated educational process and its significance.

Up to the present, the pattern of estranged relationships along racial lines has been normal. The aim of change is to make the existing pattern abnormal and to substitute for it an educational process in which Negro and white children and teachers learn and work together as a normal condition and with the development of normal relationships.

Perhaps "normal" relationships among students and teachers, i.e., a prevailing situation in which children and teachers view each other, accept each other, and work with each other as ordinary and equal human beings, does not seem a very dramatic goal. When achieved it will only seem remarkable when compared to the previous state of segregation. The distortion and tensions which accompany our historic racial system derive from the false and absurd premise on which it rests. Remove this premise and people can face each other as people, not as stereotypes.

But to make the changeover from the present normal to the desired normal represents a tremendous challenge and requires a great affirmative effort by educators and community. Full school integration is probably impossible to achieve as long as the school system is part of a larger pattern of *de facto* segregation. Nevertheless, a school system, given the understanding and will of its professional staff and a degree of support by the community, can make tremendous strides toward integration and thus bring about vast improvement in education. In turn, the progress of school integration will be a major force in weakening the grip of segregation on the total community. As the pattern weakens, the remaining steps toward full school integration can be taken.

Much discussion of school integration emphasizes racial balance. We have here stressed that school segregation, like segregation in society at

large, is a pattern composed of many beliefs and practices, even though physical separation is its most outstanding feature. An integration program should be comprehensive—i.e., an interrelated attack on all the manifestations of segregation in education. For one, the program would fail if limited to physical integration, even though the latter should be a major hinge of any program. Secondly, there is no reason why other important aspects of integration should be neglected while efforts are under way to improve racial balance.

Indeed, failure to achieve immediately full racial balance of the student population makes even more imperative that every other aspect of school operation be brought within the pattern of integration. Educators must grasp and make real the concept of a thoroughly integrated school system environment, one which reflects their professional determination to undo every vestige of segregation within their reach. The spirit and practice throughout should become such that the new atmosphere will even touch positively the hearts and minds of children still in all-white or all-Negro schools. Even they should be able to feel that they are in an environment which has rejected segregation as a way of life and which in many ways helps them come into meaningful interaction with the world across the barriers.

Instead of neutrality, accommodation, resistance to change, "color blindness," there must be affirmation: affirmation to integration as an inseparable part of affirmation to education itself. Affirmation means that educators come to grips with the ubiquitous color line wherever it exists in school processes—in politics, practices, beliefs, and attitudes. It means a process of self confrontation among professional staff, of learning how racism came into being and insinuated itself deeply into our way of life. Indeed, teachers and officials who expect children to learn and change must realize that they, too, must undergo learning and change.

Affirmation means that educators will not be satisfied with anything less than full integration. For example, teachers will realize the implications of not wanting an interracial classroom, the feeling that white and Negro children are somehow better off if kept apart. To not want an interracial classroom involves attitudes or reasoning based on the premise of invidious racial differences. In contrast, to want such a classroom means acting on the belief that it offers the best context for children and teachers to learn to work together and know each other in mutual respect and understanding.

As educators gain this realization, they will more and more confront the problem of achieving full physical integration throughout the school system. Their effort, influence, and ingenuity in behalf of the aim of interracial experience for every child will surely greatly increase the number of students who obtain this educational benefit in their schools.

There is no intention here to belittle the obstacles and complexities in the transition to integrated education. These are great. They involve massive consequences of the historic system of segregation which cannot be overcome at once, dependence on external agencies beyond the control of educators, and shortcomings of schools in other areas than integration. Nevertheless, the crucial fact for educators is that a great part of the problem is internal to education, not external.

The business of education, is, after all, to produce change in people. But educators, like other people, are reluctant to undergo change themselves. Nevertheless, they need to realize that passivity and neutrality mean only longer entrapment with segregation—a sure recipe for continuous trouble. The unhealthy tension and anxiety felt by many educators in the face of civil rights pressures can be dissolved by understanding that school integration is an urgent goal of education and the responsibility, above all, of educators. Educators should be leaders—not the reluctant followers. Integration is a hard road—but it leads to a solution, to an educational process that is sound, stable, honest, and much more productive.

► "It is an ironic fact that the Negro revolt has spawned an educational revolt that is sweeping metropolitan United States. For in disclosing the shocking inadequacies of public school education available to the Negro child in the inner zones of our central cities, the Negro has, as a by-product, also laid bare the sad state of public education available to the white city child. It is undeniable that the Negro child in the inner city has access only to a third- or fourth-rate education, as compared with the public school educational opportunities of the privileged suburban child. By the same standard, it is also undeniable that the white child in the central cities of our metropolitan areas has access only to a second- and third-rate education."

—Phillip M. Houser, University of Chicago

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"The person with a closed mind is like a person who carries a bucket of cement, all mixed up and permanently set."

—Clarence R. Bungay